



2007-2008 School Year “Mini-Report”

Communities In Schools of Georgia: Unifying community resources that empower at-risk youth to compete in a global economy.

Introduction

Georgia is experiencing a dropout epidemic, with more than 20,000 students failing to graduate each year – placing it in the five worst states across America. That’s why Communities In Schools has been leveraging community resources to support Georgia youth and improve graduation rates, academic achievement, and job and post-secondary school readiness for more than 35 years. Our proven methods simultaneously decrease negative academic and “life” outcomes, such as violence and disruptions in the classroom.

According to a rigorous independent study, “CIS is one of a very small number of dropout prevention programs in the country proven to keep students in school and is the only dropout prevention program in the nation with research to prove that it increases graduation rates.”

We experienced significant organizational and programmatic growth in recent years, while increasing the effectiveness of local affiliates through training and other methods, even in a down economy. The following report (covering the 2007-2008 school year) provides an organizational background, catalogues our successes, and points to evolutionary strides in the coming years to solidify CIS of Georgia’s position as the state’s leading education and dropout prevention organization.

Organizational Overview

Communities In Schools is a national network that uses a unique, scientifically-proven model to empower young people and their parents to take responsibility for their futures by removing obstacles to learning, providing and coordinating social services directly in the community, easing the burden on parents, and allowing teachers to teach and students to learn.

This year, the CIS statewide network of affiliates ***served more than 163,000 students in 67 school systems*** with Performance Learning Centers® (PLCs – alternative learning environments for students struggling in traditional schools), graduation coach training, mentoring, parent engagement, literacy, youth leadership, tutoring, and after-school programs.

Communities In Schools is different from traditional education support organizations because we partner with local school districts and community organizations to connect needed resources and services both to kids at risk of dropping out *and their families*. We are able to promote student achievement by meeting the unique needs of each youth, including providing social services in one case or a more intensive after-school tutoring program for another. CIS believes every child needs and deserves the Five Basics[®]:

- A personal, one-on-one relationship with a caring adult
- A safe place to learn and grow
- A healthy start and a healthy future
- A marketable skill to use upon graduation
- A chance to give back to peers and community

Results

The Communities In Schools mission includes “community-based integrated student services” because we realize that schools are rarely equipped to simultaneously address the academic *and* life challenges facing so many Georgia students. The CIS of Georgia state office provides training, supervisory assistance, program evaluation, fundraising support, advocacy, communications, and other functions to our 50 affiliates so that they are empowered to focus on serving the social and non-instructional needs of students. ***CIS services enable schools and teachers to concentrate on teaching and learning.***

The 163,000 at-risk students CIS affiliates in Georgia served in 2007-2008 would fill Turner Field in Atlanta for a three-game home stand. That’s more than twice the number of children supported just five years ago! The number increased by over 60,000 in the last two years alone, because we’ve worked closely with the superintendents for Atlanta Public Schools and DeKalb County Public Schools who have come to rely on school-based CIS Site Coordinators to improve services and educational opportunities for at-risk students in their districts. **Communities In Schools services are leading to real results for the 2007-2008 school year:**

Numbers Served

- CIS served 697 school and community-based sites throughout the state
- CIS supported more than 163,000 Georgia students (unduplicated), including:
 - Intensive services to 31,180 at-risk students in need of on-going support
 - “Whole-school” prevention and short-term intervention services to 142,368 students
- CIS affiliates provide support to adults in their communities as a way to enable school and student success, including:
 - Direct services (such as education) to 10,453 parents
 - Parental involvement services to more than 32,000 parents
 - Additional offerings through our network of Parental Information and Resource Centers, with regional hubs delivering direct parent engagement services
- The CIS Georgia network recruits and delivers volunteer resources to support students and schools, yielding:
 - 3,654 student mentors and 5,242 volunteers (tutoring and other unique services)
 - 142,465 hours of volunteer services to students and schools
 - 72,000 hours of service by CIS of Georgia AmeriCorps and VISTA volunteers
 - 212,465 total hours of volunteer support across Georgia
 - \$4,184,212 in volunteer equivalent value as estimated by Independent Sector

Student Outcomes

Attendance

- 72.4 percent of students missing 10 days or more prior to **CIS improved their attendance**
- Student average daily **attendance rose** to 92.3 percent from 89.1 percent prior to CIS intervention, an average gain of 5.6 days of attendance per year

Discipline

- 74.2 percent of students with disciplinary problems resulting in suspension prior to CIS **improved their behavior**
- Average student **suspensions dropped** from 4.3 per year to 2.3 because of CIS intervention
- 42 percent of students with existing disciplinary problems **remained suspension-free** while in a CIS program

Academics

- Nearly two-thirds of CIS students with a history of **academic failure improved**
- More than 95 percent of elementary and middle school **students improved their reading skills** through CIS programs
- 76 percent of PLC **students improved academically**, increasing their GPA a mean of 11.4 points

Progress Toward Graduation

- The dropout rate for at-risk CIS middle school students was 0.1 percent compared to 0.7 percent for non-CIS students
- Nearly 94 percent of at-risk CIS high school students stayed in school or graduated
- 1,082 students received their high school diplomas through CIS of Georgia PLCs
- More than 91 percent of at-risk CIS high school students graduated or remained in school
- More than 89 percent of at-risk CIS elementary and more than 90 percent of CIS middle school students successfully advanced to the next grade

New Initiatives

Communities In Schools programs evolved considerably the last five years and now include statewide strategies like the Graduation Coaches and Community Coaches programs and PLCs in areas where CIS affiliates are active. Also in 2008, we completed a critical evaluation of our state office staffing and structural model, which led to some tough cuts and thoughtful modifications that will enable us to accelerate our progress toward a more systemic, state- and district-level impact on student success. Strategic partnerships will play an increasingly critical role as we seek to deepen our services to individual students while also ensuring that more education leaders understand the critical importance of non-instructional obstacles to student learning and excelling in the classroom.

Key institutional and programmatic initiatives completed during the past year include:

- Supporting the rollout of CIS National's Total Quality System (TQS), which is a set of standards designed to strengthen local affiliates' ability to develop, implement, and sustain student service programs. TQS includes board development, fiscal management, data collection and reporting, program planning, marketing and communications, and other critical areas of organizational strength. Experts from the CIS of Georgia state office serve as TQS coaches, offering extensive technical assistance as local affiliate directors work to meet the increased standards.
- Partnering with the Georgia Mentoring Partnership and the Parental Information & Resource Centers to offer a training and national conference focused on mentoring programs and adult involvement in students' lives. More than 250 people attended the three-day September conference. CIS of Georgia staff took a leadership role in developing the curriculum, securing nationally-recognized trainers and experts, and publicizing the conference. The event was open to all CIS affiliate directors, Graduation Coaches, PLC team members, and partners from around the state. CIS of Georgia leveraged the conference to save money and maximize resources by hosting its semi-annual affiliate executive director meeting at the same time.
- Completing a communications audit (surveys, interviews, issue research, etc.) to develop internal and external materials and CIS affiliate training sessions to better understand the work we do and to communicate it to various audiences in an effort to increase image, influence and income.

Key institutional and programmatic initiatives (continued)

- Adding five new CIS of Georgia board members, representing local affiliates, private sector companies, the Georgia Department of Education, and other partners. The Board is more active, with the formation of six working committees and a dynamic chair, Chris Womack (Southern Company).
- An annual giving campaign netting 100 percent participation by board members for the second consecutive year, with 2008 contributions up 14 percent compared to 2007.
- Redesigning the CIS of Georgia organizational and staffing structure to integrate field services, such as training and technical support, across the full spectrum of CIS programs (local affiliates, PLCs, Graduation and Community Coaches) for greater effectiveness and cost efficiency.
- Increasingly strong partnerships with public and private entities across Georgia to increase high school graduation rates, college and workforce readiness, and postsecondary enrollment.
- Being recognized with a grant award by the Georgia Board of Regents for helping to increase the numbers of underrepresented students enrolling in the state's colleges and universities.
- Increasing state and national thought leadership for state office management, including:
 - Remarks at the National Dropout Prevention Network Conference held in Atlanta in November, alongside Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue and State School Superintendent Kathy Cox
 - October presentation on CIS's impact by Dr. Beverly Hall (Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools) at Bank of America
 - A proposed Georgia graduation summit in 2009 to be co-hosted with America's Promise

Core Programs

Performance Learning Centers (PLCs)

CIS of Georgia launched the first two PLCs in 2003. More than \$13 million in investment from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the state of Georgia and several local foundations and corporations helped grow the current number to 25. PLCs are part of the local school system to ensure their sustainability, but CIS of Georgia created the model and continues to oversee their implementation and evaluation. The program's success led CIS National to replicate the model across additional states, and CIS of Georgia is providing technical assistance throughout the process.

Georgia's PLC model is recognized for its ability to provide failing students, or those who have already dropped out, with the opportunity to graduate owning the skills necessary to succeed in college or the workforce. The program offers school districts a viable option for increasing their graduation rates. More than 3,120 students have graduated from PLCs since 2003, including 1,100 this past year alone. The *total number* of PLC graduates has risen, but so has the percentage – up to 79 percent last year.

Graduation Coaches/Community Coaches

Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue witnessed results delivered by the PLC model and recognized that having a CIS Site Coordinator at each school was a key component of their positive student outcomes. This was a key factor in his decision in 2006 to deploy a Graduation Coach in every high school across the state. He replicated the program for every Georgia middle school in 2007. Governor Perdue tapped CIS of Georgia to support the Georgia Department of Education in developing and training all of the state's Graduation Coaches. Results to date include:

- Training 138 coaches at a two-day session this past July
- Leading the first regional trainings (Tifton, Dublin and Gwinnett), with more than 625 coaches in Gwinnett alone

Graduation Coaches/Community Coaches: Results (continued)

- Co-sponsoring the National Dropout Prevention Network Conference in Atlanta this November, which was attended by nearly 600 Graduation Coaches – 40 of them making presentations
- Reporting a five percent rise in Georgia’s graduation rate since implementation of the Graduation Coach program, with an additional 8,277 students graduating last year alone

The trainings highlighted how most coaches feel “covered up” helping at-risk students with credit recovery and academic graduation requirements, leaving limited time for students’ other equally important needs. This led former CIS of Georgia board chair Kerry Campbell (Georgia Power) to develop the Community Coaches program – a statewide network of volunteers accessing local resources to meet student needs in conjunction with local Graduation Coach activities. CIS of Georgia began matching Community and Graduation Coaches, pairing more than 75 percent at the high school level within the program’s early stages. Part-time community volunteers are no substitute for full-time, school-based Site Coordinators, but they do provide a vital service and simultaneously raise awareness of the educational benefits that accrue when schools address students’ non-instructional needs.

Our Future

CIS of Georgia, as demonstrated throughout this report, has continued to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs and needs of its students, parents and partners. This leads to constant generation of new programs and statewide and community-driven relationships. The following are a few examples of initiatives underway that will define the future of CIS of Georgia activities.

Evaluating Georgia’s Performance Learning Center Model

CIS of Georgia’s leadership realized the importance of retaining an independent organization to evaluate and document the PLC model’s effectiveness as it entered its sixth year of operation. ICF International, who previously studied CIS National, recently began a multi-year assessment of CIS of Georgia’s core student services activities. ICF will compare graduation rates in similar school districts with and without PLCs. Surveys and case studies will evaluate the model’s effectiveness, and a report should be delivered in mid-2009. Preliminary findings are positive, including the fact that **graduation rates in districts with PLCs rose by 1.3 percent after a single year and more than 7.5 points in the second.**

CIS of Georgia Training Institute

The program is at an initial stage, and more information will be released soon. But CIS of Georgia is developing a Training Institute as an enhancement to existing teacher preparation programs with an eye towards better equipping educators to enter the classroom. Each of the workshops or seminars addresses at least one of the non-cognitive variables that are required for effective classroom leadership. The CIS of Georgia Training Institute is:

- A research-based series of seminars
- Designed to help close the gap between academic and non-academic student needs
- Addressing non-cognitive college success variables
- A critical enhancement to a rigorous teacher preparation curriculum (pre-service and in-service)

Life and Learning Academy

Communities In Schools of Georgia is partnering with the National Coalition of Exemplary Schools and several Georgia organizations to implement a series of Life and Learning Academies at the middle school level. These PLC-esque alternative schools are designed for at-risk students struggling behind their peer group. Once implemented, they enable students to gain academic, organizational, leadership, and social skills to succeed in regular high school.

Life and Learning Academy (continued)

Hallmarks of the schools include:

- 1:15 teacher-student ratio
- Highly-qualified teachers who receive additional targeted training
- An expanded school calendar (200 school days per year vs. 180 in traditional school)
- Site coordinators to help meet students' non-academic needs
- The "mainstreaming" of students with learning disabilities
- Classes that are gender specific

Affiliate Fundraising Results

In 2008, 14 CIS local affiliates and the state office participated in the Annual Campaign for Communities In Schools. Using the 5-Star program developed in 2006 by CIS of Georgia and piloted in 2007, the Annual Campaign seeks to build capacity across the CIS of Georgia network for raising new, unrestricted funds from individual donors to complement and leverage support from the state, foundations, and corporations. The annual campaign components consist of "five stars:"

Star 1 – Development of a written campaign plan

Star 2 – Obtaining financial gifts from 100 percent of affiliate board members

Star 3 – Completion of at least 30 face-to-face presentations and "asks"

Star 4 – Receipt of gifts from at least 100 individual donors or double the previous year's donors

Star 5 – Achievement of campaign goal

Ten of the 14 organizations participating in 2008 achieved both Stars 1 and 2. None of the CIS affiliates (or the state office) had achieved 100 percent board giving prior to the 5-Star program launch in 2007.

Local affiliates completing Stars 1 and 2 are eligible to receive challenge funds based on the number of gifts and pledges of at least \$1,000 that they secure from individual donors. These individuals are recognized as North Star Society donors across the state and each North Star Society level gift is matched with \$1,000 from CIS of Georgia challenge funds.

In the program's first two years, 206 North Star Society donors delivered \$594,000 in new, unrestricted revenue for CIS programs. CIS of Glynn County leads the network with 37 North Star Society donors. And a number of other programs have more than 10 such donors, including Atlanta, Athens/Clarke County, Berrien County, Colquitt County, Turner County, and the state office. Challenge grants paid to support the 2008 Annual Campaign totaled \$91,000.

The future of the Annual Campaign for Communities In Schools appears bright. CIS of Georgia partnered with several local affiliates that mounted successful annual campaigns to offer three workshops last fall in preparation for the 2009 giving year. Nineteen Local Affiliates and the state office will participate in this year's campaign.

Bridgebuilder Grants

CIS of Georgia established the Bridgebuilder Grant program in 2008 to encourage collaboration between local CIS affiliates, Graduation Coaches, Community Coaches, PLC staff, and other potential community partners. The guidelines strongly encourage evaluation and assessment to help ensure that the new programs generate additional stay-in-school models and best practices.

In September and November 2008, the Bridgebuilder committee awarded 23 grants to CIS affiliates, ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, to support new and innovative programs that promote student achievement. Collaboration with other community members invested in school success is the key element in each of these new programs. New relationships are being formed through the grants program to strengthen the safety net for vulnerable students. In FY2008, CIS of Georgia awarded more than \$75,000 in Bridgebuilder grants.

Support Our Cause

Communities In Schools of Georgia is providing real results and changing the future for many of our children in jeopardy of dropping out. We need your support to continue this important work. But it's important to note, we hope to provide strong ROI to our partners, including:

- Public relations and other tools to publicly show our appreciation
- Enhanced leadership skills for our mentors, volunteers and board members
- The opportunity to deepen your community relationships

We appreciate all the donor and volunteer support we receive each year. Here are a few ways you can get involved today:

- Serve as a tutor, mentor or volunteer in schools and Performance Learning Centers across Georgia
- Participate in the annual Dine Out for Kids and Student Achievement Month programs, including volunteer service, grants and donations at the state level
- Corporations have a unique opportunity to donate funds to support a wide range of CIS of Georgia programs and services, while encouraging their employees to volunteer locally in the communities they serve